# Vermont legislature sends 'civil union' bill to governor

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**WASHINGTON** —.Vermont lawmakers' decision Tuesday to grant marriage-style benefits to same-sex couples was hailed by gay rights activists throughout the nation as a victory and decried by conservative Christians as a sad day for the American family.

"This is a giant step forward toward full equality," David Smith, spokesman for the Human Rights Campaign, a gay rights' group, said as the House gave final approval to the bill and sent it to Gov. Howard Dean for his signature.

"Vermont becomes the first state in the nation to offer the rights, benefits and privileges of marriage to gay and lesbian couples," Smith said, adding that while the civil union law is a "tremendous victory" gay Americans are disappointed that Vermont stopped short of legalizing gay marriage.

"Vermont chose to take care of its gay and lesbian citizens in a much fairer and more compassionate way than other states," Smith said.

But some Christian groups denounced Vermont lawmakers for going against the will of Vermonters and "assaulting" marriage. They said the civil union law amounts to approval of gay marriage because it gives gay couples the same legal benefits as married heterosexuals.

"This is a sad day not only for the citizens of Vermont, but for the institution of marriage as Western civilization has known it," said Tom Minnery, a vice president of Focus on the Family. "It is an unprecedented assault on marriage, re-defining what we have held as foundational truth in this country for generations."

Minnery predicted courts throughout the nation will hear challenges to traditional marriage as gay couples travel to Vermont for civil ceremonies and then try to get their home states to recognize those unions.

"The people of Vermont have repeatedly spoken out against this, but their elected officials have chosen to defy their will and have, instead, cowered to a handful of homosexual activists," Minnery said.

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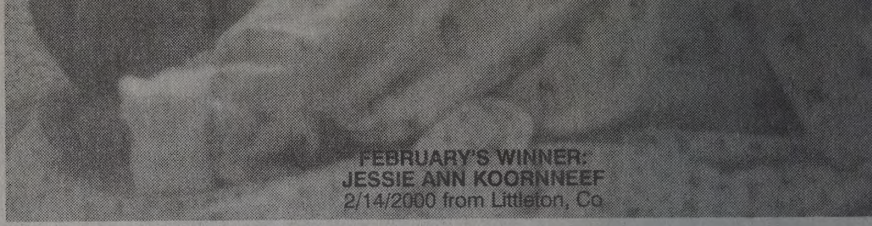
**Tom Minnery,** a vice president of Focus on the Family, a nonprofit Christian group based in Colorado Springs.



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